

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 985

FL 800 276

AUTHOR Isserlis, Janet
TITLE On Women, Literacy, and Learning: An Investigation.
PUB DATE May 90
NOTE 29p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Attitudes; Educational Change; Equal Education; *Family Characteristics; Intergenerational Programs; *Literacy Education; Sex Differences; *Sociocultural Patterns; *Womens Education

ABSTRACT

Existing work and research on literacy education across generations is reviewed, focusing on issues of gender inherent in literacy learning and considering them within a broader social context. In examining existing initiatives in family literacy, the meaning of intergenerational or family literacy is examined and critical questions about the family literacy movement's agenda are posed. It is argued that literacy exists in many forms, carries multiple meanings, significance and consequences, and does not exist as a monolithic entity, and that learners live and interact with literacy outside the classroom walls. The distinct roles of men and women in literacy transmission and transference within home and community settings are examined. Finally, the need for change in attitudes toward and provision of literacy education in the United States, using insights gained from examination of these sociocultural factors, is discussed. Forty-one references are included. (MSE)
(Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED324985

ON WOMEN, LITERACY, AND LEARNING:

AN INVESTIGATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

☐ Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Isserlis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

JANET ISSERLIS

MAY 1990

FL800276

Foreword

Throughout the paper you're about to read I speak of literacy and literacies and yet don't explicitly define these words. Instead, I present here assumptions I hold about literacy and literacy learning which I hope will clarify my meanings in my discussion of women, families and literacy.

The assumptions:

that learners come to class with extensive knowledge of the world, and are capable of doing many things;

that literacy is socially constructed, and that reading and writing are socially situated occurrences;

that learners wish to learn to read and write in English for a variety of reasons;

that adults do things with reading and writing, and that part of the mutually constructed work that occurs within the classes I facilitate has to do with learning more about learners' own uses of reading and writing;

that there exists a plurality of literacies, and hence a plurality of uses, valuing and needs revolving around literacy and print interaction; these literacies span a continuum from 'functional' (decoding/encoding) literacy to a more critical reading and writing of the word and the world (Freire);

that reading and writing meaningful content subsumes but does not exclude development of subskills in a contextualized manner;

that the learning process is enhanced when learners and facilitators work together from strengths each possesses, when learners and the learning process are valued, and when community is established among learners and teachers.

One broader assumption pertains to the understanding of literacy as one of many tools needed in a process of empowerment. In and of itself, literacy is not empowering per se, but exists as a tool or a weapon through which people may or may not act/act differently to change their lives in some way.

The purpose of this paper is to consider existing work and research on literacy learning across generations, to attempt to locate issues of gender inherent in literacy learning and to consider these phenomena within a broader social context. In examining existing initiatives around family literacy I attempt to explicate what is meant when speaking of intergenerational or family literacies and to pose critical questions about the agenda set forth within the parameters of the family literacy movement. I argue that literacy exists in a multiplicity of forms, carries multiple meanings, significance and consequences, and does not exist as a monolithic entity. Thus, in attempting to understand learners' relationships to literacy acquisition, I necessarily view learners as people who exist and interact with literacy beyond the classroom walls. Finally, and tentatively, I attempt to situate my inquiry within a framework which explicitly acknowledges men and women's roles of transmission and transference of literacies within home and community settings. This framework acknowledges an attempt to make the familiar strange by examining a familiar context (literacy learning in the United States) in such a way as to distance myself from it in order to describe it and then to reinsert myself into my own data in order to advocate for needed change in attitudes toward and provision of literacy instruction in the U.S.

My findings here derive from cited sources and from direct interaction with literacy learners in schools, homes and in the community. I hope to provide an overview of family/intergenerational literacies as currently defined, to posit questions around assumptions implicit in such definitions, to attempt to build a framework of questions for consideration about learners who would potentially participate in such programs, and finally, to try to explore the implications inherent in all of the above. In so doing, I hope to provide the reader sufficient background into literacy learning in adult community based settings, and to try to connect this information to my own exploration into gender roles in refugee and

immigrant families, particularly as these inform and influence decisions and actions related to education and acquisition of literacy in English.

Assumptions about notions of family, specifically mothers' roles in the transmission of literacy practices, permeate current mainstream policy and programming around literacy provision in this country. Popular media and professional journals reflect the 'deficit' notion of learning; that students lack basic skills and that schools and training programs will 'remediate' and give people these skills. ERIC Digest No. 92 from the Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education cites a typical compendium of such assertions:

- Seventy-five percent of female heads of households with less than a high school diploma are living in poverty;
- Young women with below average skills and below poverty incomes are five and one-half times more likely to become teen parents;
- Literacy levels of children are strongly linked to those of their parents;
- The greatest predictor of a child's future academic success is the literacy of the child's mother;
- As the numbers of families headed by low-literate women increase, the cycle of illiteracy is perpetuated.

Program and policy decisions are based upon assertions such as those stated above, and perpetuate a deficit view of women as lacking in basic skills needed to enter the job force and/or maintain employment. Assumptions are made about women and literacy which place women at risk of becoming lost in the ensuing political shuffle when educational programming is dictated by the needs of the welfare state. By this I mean that welfare work-to-earn programs are mandating that single mothers enter into job training programs, ostensibly to 'fix' the problem of economic dependence. This mandate seems to assume that if women learn the basic skills needed to perform routine jobs they will earn enough money to leave public assistance rolls and then the state will be better off. Further, by improving their own literacy skills, mothers will thus inculcate positive attitudes towards education in their children, and their children will thus become literate (future) workers. This thinking is flawed in many ways for a number of

reasons, not the least of which is that few paid jobs produce the income and health insurance benefits equivalent to that which is allocated by state assistance (welfare) programs. Hence, even those single mothers who want to work or enter job training find that the change in economic status awaiting them upon employment is prohibitive.

Ramdas cites a document published by the National Literacy Mission in India in 1988 which similarly reflects the American statistics cited above. The Indian document quotes several studies to show "the manner in which 'literacy affects human resource development'" (p. 36), (and also reflects many similar statements issued through UNESCO over the years):

- i. "Children's participation in Primary Education increases dramatically" - and ...talks of the role of "literate parents" in promoting primary education.
- ii. "Infant mortality goes down"
- iv. "Fertility rate declines" - the major concern is that higher literacy levels might influence couples to adopt family-planning measures...
- v. "Women's self-confidence and self-image improves" - "Through literacy women become aware of their social and legal rights, learn and improve income-generating skills, acquire a voice in the affairs of the family and community, and move towards equal participation in the processes of development and social change."

Ramdas' citation falls within a section of her paper entitled Literacy for empowerment of Domestication?, and questions the ideological underpinnings of literacy campaigns and missions:

One has only to look at what education has meant to the average educated middle class women in both socialist and capitalist systems, developed and developing societies, to realize that access to education and literacy does not automatically ensure justice....Women's groups would contest the simplistic assumption that increased literacy and education have indeed brought this [middle class] woman justice in any meaningful sense of the term.

Ramdas, p. 37

Ramdas reflects the reality of consequences of literacy for women in a global sense; Harman and Edelsky focus their description of disruptive consequences of literacy on women in America. I cite their work, and the statistics cited above in attempting to contextualize the funding climate in which many literacy programs function in this country and to explicate assumptions against which literacy practitioners work.

An alternative view of learning insists that learners bring their own understandings and experience in the world to the learning process, and that this prior knowledge and experience cannot be separated from that process, and in fact, contributes significantly to learning. Learning may or may not be directed towards seeking gainful employment. Literacy practitioners work with learners to engage in mutually constructed literacy activity. That activity reflects learners' prior knowledge and current concerns and builds content through dialogic interaction. Meaningful material is written and read by learners. In a participatory (Freirean) approach conflicts, such as those posited by Ramdas, are made explicit and become the core of the learning material/curriculum.

Recent trends in literacy learning and instruction turn towards what is known as family literacy, and function on the premise that literate parents prepare literate children for success in mainstream literate school practice. Chronically in need of funding sources, literacy providers in the United States are in the process of examining existing family and intergenerational literacy programs, with the aim of replicating such programs themselves. Local assessment and implementation strategies are needed in order to adapt or integrate such programs into their own institutions, and perspectives of local settings and learners must inform policy and programming. ("Once inside cultures, ethnographers deal face to face with people doing things with each other. However broad the conclusions they would like to reach, their data are always local." Ray McDermott - course abstract, AERA, 1990).

At best, family literacy programs consider the fact that literate behavior neither begins nor ends within the school walls, but in fact permeates many aspects of contemporary urban life. At worst, it is based upon assumptions which impose a school transmission model upon learners; a model wherein the school possesses knowledge, values and beliefs which it transmits to its students.

For the purposes of this discussion, the distinction between family learning and intergenerational learning is explicated. 'Family', per se, seems to be a guideline for programs which explicitly allow children and their parents to participate together in literacy learning. In some instances, 'parent' may be equated with primary caregiver. In other cases where learners of different ages come together around literacy in some context, programs describe themselves as providing intergenerational learning. These distinctions are not hard and fast. The very notion of family can be viewed as a cultural construct, and among many learners, family and community might be blurred distinctions. (Educational policy makers tend to privilege the nuclear, blood-kin family).

Government's interest and involvement in family literacy programs is tied to economic self-sufficiency in the U.S. and to 'development' in third world countries. The **US Department of Education** ^{News} released in October of 1989, announced that new Even Start Awards would "fund projects linking early childhood education with adult education to help disadvantaged parents prepare and assist their children to succeed in school... [and] also [to] reinforce the learning experiences of the early school years."

Similarly, **New Partnerships**^a joint-agency publication explaining the parameters of the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988 speaks in terms of "reaching beyond the purview of any one system ...[in attacking the goal of] helping families avoid long-term dependence on public assistance" (p. 4). The linkages between the FSA, Even Start and other public assistance work to earn programs necessarily involve concerted effort on the parts of educators and social service providers across the board. Such collaboration may or may not mitigate positively against the multiple agenda within such programs. (An extended discussion below calls for collaboration among educators and others in order to work against the government's hidden agenda -- maintaining economic strength among good and literate American workers).

The DOE release cites examples of three Even Start service models; in rural Monticello, Utah, mobile learning laboratories, targeted for use by native American Indians; an urban plan in Lowell, Massachusetts which creates a family-oriented Shared Literacy center; and a Migrant Home Literacy Program in Albany, NY, to "give parents of three and four year old children the knowledge, motivation, skills and resources needed to help their children". A participatory and innovative Even Start program in Washington state has "teachers begin each ten-week cycle with an assessment and analysis of learners' needs" with which to design meaningful study units based on learners' needs. For teachers for whom such needs-based learning is too 'risky', there is a state-developed competency-based curriculum to "fall back on". (Ranard, 2).

Even Start/OBEMLA (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs) is not the only funder of family programs. The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, and private corporations, among others (nationally) have turned their sights towards family and intergenerational learning. Historical and sociological implications may lurk behind the Bush Foundation; their agenda may also be viewed as economically based and driven.

An overview of well known family literacy programs includes far more programs for native speakers of English than for refugees or immigrants. Ruth Nickse examines whether parents and/or children may directly benefit from instruction. Nickse (BCEL, 4/89) stresses the need for: literacy and parenting education for adults; literacy and pre-literacy activities for children; systematic parent/child interaction around literacy; emphasis on parents as teachers; interdisciplinary teamwork between ABE (adult basic education) and early childhood educators; and liaison activity with community providers who interact with the populations targeted for such literacy programming. Although it could be argued that this is a prescriptive view of family literacy, and further argued that not all of this prescription might meet the needs of refugee and immigrant

populations, Nickse does provide some sort of framework through which to build and consider programs that might work for multicultural populations.

It seems that most family literacy curricula include some aspect of parent and/or parenting issues, survival skills and school/cultural orientation, along with 'basic' English and ESL (English as a second language) literacy. Clearly, the ways in which these component pieces are brought together and the methodologies through which this occurs vary from site to site. An ethnographic understanding of participants' lives as well as teachers' particular pedagogical inclinations affects this diversity. When some literacy practitioners might favor a participatory approach, such as that described above, others either lack experience with or exposure to such pedagogy or else are bidden by their own biases and/or funding mandates to engage in prescriptive skills building. This 'skills and drills' approach is one wherein teachers teach and students learn. The teacher holds the knowledge and the learners need to obtain that knowledge. Learners' prior knowledge or strengths are largely unacknowledged. Skills and drills -- particularly within the context of job training programs -- basically come in one size fits all.

In considering the realities of day-to-day life and learning among non-native speakers of English in the United States, I first present a snapshot of adult education for second language learners in urban settings. My direct experience derives from work done primarily in Providence, and from observations made during site visits around the country in other urban adult learning settings. Additionally, two similar sites I visited in England bear remarkable resemblance to American community based adult learning settings.

Community based education typically occurs in cramped, makeshift spaces -- windowless basements, meeting rooms, public school classrooms on loan for the evenings, and reflect the marginalized status of its participants. Learners frequently come to class before or after 8 or more

hours of work, and/or childcare. Motivation to learn is strong; familial obligations generally account for irregular attendance and retention of learners nonetheless.

Adult education classes are frequently filled not only with adult learners, but also with their children, or their neighbors' children -- toddlers, newborns, kids out of school because they're sick, or missed the bus. Where the childrens' presence had been distracting, but unavoidable, practitioners now begin to look at ways to embrace and include these young learners. Ramdas cites "the need for daycare facilities to enable women to participate more fully in literacy programs.." and discusses "the kind of barriers that face those who attempt to focus on problems of female literacy as distinct from literacy in general" (p. 27).

Certainly, child care and family obligations comprise barriers to learning for many women in this country. Internationally, and particularly in the third world, family/kin obligations mitigate far more heavily against womens' access to literacy. In some instances, culturally and economically imbued attitudes towards women and education emigrate to this country and account, to some extent, for women's non-participation in literacy education here. Harman and Edelsky describe a woman being threatened at knife point by her husband not to attend literacy class. A colleague at a worksite program reports that a female learner left the class because her husband would not allow her to continue studying; Nickse recounts a husband's ultimatum to his wife that she need not bother to return home if she goes to her literacy class. As women gain voice through gaining literacy, family power balances shift. Not only are other family members confused or threatened by womens' learning; women themselves are often unclear about the ramifications of their own developing literacies.

Family and friends may express resentment, jealousy, abandonment or simply incomprehension at their loved one's movement away from them. And the student may ache with embarrassment at her family's inadequacies. ...[T]he adult learner's world may be shaken more by the changing patterns resulting from acquiring literacy... Breslin (1987) writes the sad story of a young working class wife's need to educate herself... and her hard-

working, hard-drinking husband's baffled and limited response (that she should get pregnant)." [Harman and Edelsky, p. 38]

Ramdas' statement that 70 per cent of the 1,000 million "illiterate people in the world today are women and girls" (p. 28) comes then as no surprise. Her figures underlie reasons for both the presence and absence of women learning literacy in educational (non-home) settings.

Given that women in this country face obstacles from within the community as well as mandates from without, it is important to understand the range of learning opportunities and choices available to them.

Some programs, such as that of El Centro del Cardinal (part of the U Mass/OBEMLA Family Literacy Program) incorporated literacy-related play events within the classroom. Adults and children shared a common space. Through a problem-posing participatory approach, issues of learning were situated in a social context which included the family, the roles of parents and children, and the real life barriers to learning which affected participants at the programs' three sites. Such an approach, ideally, derives from ethnographic study, informed perhaps by an anthropological understanding through which global issues of literacy and the family are localized through ethnographic inquiry. By this I mean that ethnographic learning about community and family settings would enable literacy practitioners to design and implement programs which would meet learners' far ranging needs. An 'anthropological understanding' would further increase the practitioner's ability to frame her work more broadly; explicitly acknowledging the role of literacy and education for women in social and economic frameworks.

Auerbach reports that teachers in the Family Literacy Program at U Mass came to know about their learners' lives after classes had been underway for some time. This post facto reporting on social conditions through learners' descriptions of their lives may represent some form of what I would call secondary ethnography. ('Secondary' because of its re-

moval from direct participant observation). Although arguably not the most empirically reliable way in which to account for people's lives, it is valuable pedagogically for teachers to begin their ethnography from afar (indirect ethnography derived from learners' reports on their lives and communities) through attentive listening within the classroom process in order to shed light on myths and assumptions which might prevail. Teachers and policy makers who may be ill equipped to pursue local ethnographic inquiry may still be able to learn about their learners' social contexts through explicitly exploring these contexts within the content of classroom interaction.

This joint exploration in and explication of learners' lives is vitally important to the educational process. Without such an exploration (with learners in classes and/or through participant observation, ethnography or community involvement), programs easily run the risk of the transmission-of schools model; relying on prescriptive curricula, top-down power hierarchies and bottom-up skills building. Funding mandates ("get these women into jobs") further mitigate against the provision of more than 'functional' literacy instruction.

The HELP curriculum (Home English Literacy for Parents: An ESL Family Literacy Curriculum), developed by the Northwest Educational Cooperative is a case in point. It lends itself to participatory and problem-posing approaches while providing a competency based format from which teachers might select topics for discussion. Actual use of the curriculum will vary according to factors such as practitioners' pedagogical bias or program mandates. Sections on English survival ('life skills') and school related competencies allow for, and provide suggested generative questions towards exploring parent and parenting issues.

Arguably, the HELP curriculum could be used to shore up the deficit model assumptions made about parents and cited earlier. Implemented as part of an ongoing teaching/learning situation, the curriculum could become a

heuristic device for tackling those very assumptions collaboratively with learners and facilitators. Practitioners and ethnographers working in concert (see Ulichny and Shroeder, Barton, Heath) risk learning about the educational 'other' as well, hence informing and improving their own practice. My own bias is toward a mutually constructed curriculum, such as that described by Auerbach, Shor, Freire, and others. The likelihood of such curricula being funded by mainstream providers is slim at best. Again, an overt convergence of anthropologists and educators (including feminists, historians, Freirean scholars and learners), may create a strengthened collaborative base through which progressive educators may be able to enlarge the scope of their work, making it perhaps more palatable to funders, and more available to learners.

The assumption that school and home literacies are connected is implicit in virtually all program descriptions. Reginald Clark (cited. Literacy Beat 6/88, p. 5) states that "families in the same neighborhood can be organized very differently, in ways not determined by race or class and not dependent on strong literacy skills of parents". Clark's understanding of the realities of communities provides a case in point through which a collaborative approach across disciplines could strengthen the understandings and implementation of a range of program possibilities -- including parents' involvement in the schools, native language literacy, joint programs run for refugees, immigrants and native speakers of English through the public schools, community based efforts, etc.

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines examine black families living in an urban neighborhood in which these differences are manifest. They raise issues which challenge Sticht's equation of 'smart' with literate. All the mothers in Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines study were literate (and most were school literate, and functionally literate). Yet, these mothers' birth rates were higher than those which might have been planned by 'smart' middle class women. Hence, notions of culture, views on childbearing and

valuing of children come into play, and challenge the 'smart is literate' equation. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines examine the mismatch of skills and values found in non-mainstream families in contemporary urban America, and those literacy-related values promulgated by the schools. Additionally, they report on the role of one father in his childrens' literacy and educational development. Heath examines similar literacy activities in the rural southeast, and Weinstein-Shr considers Hmong refugees in their interaction with literacies in the inner city.

Heath's and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' longitudinal ethnographic studies in rural and urban communities, explicitly examine literate behavior in and out of schools. The impact and effect of parental roles -- male and female -- are embedded in much of their work, and challenge mainstream assumptions about the role and impact of literacy acquisition in the lives of the 'Other', (the linguistic or ethnic minority parent). Their work leads to a consideration of domains -- public/private; male/female; father/mother. The intersections of home/school domains construed against an overlay of family and community relationships may reveal yet other ways in which to learn about what it is we mean when we talk about literacies and ways in which literate behavior surfaces, appears, and intrudes in the lives of non-mainstream peoples.

Around the country, parental involvement programs around a number of school-related issues are growing in number, and challenge assumptions about what immigrant and refugee parents may or may not believe to be true about the schools and the role(s) of their childrens' teachers. These parents' involvement and interest in their childrens' education refute evidence of the "deficit hypothesis" to which Auerbach and Clark (above) make reference. It cannot be assumed that parents lack the skills to promote school success in their children, nor that there exists a monolithic language minority household wherein nothing about school or literacy in the US is understood. Nor are schools the only venues in which parent/

child literacy activity occurs.

Some literacy programs invite parental involvement in the schools through at-home reading programs. Children read books, and their parents sign a form to that effect when each book is completed. Auerbach reports on the Chinle Navajo Parent-Child Reading Program, "another project designed to build home and school links . "Children share books with parents either by reading or telling the stories... and also write their own books based on Navajo stories" which they've heard from parents or grandparents. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines cite autobiographical writing as a component of home and family based literacies -- what they refer to as sociohistorical reading and writing.

Fran Filipek Collignon, a colleague at the International Institute of RI, cites instances of literacy interaction in the Hmong community in Providence. Story telling is an ongoing intergenerational event in Hmong households. Stories are valued and told at midday, at bedtime and during other family events. Although these stories provide fertile ground for development of more school-related literacy, mainstream teachers are largely unaware of them. Literacy and education for women is devalued among some (generally older) members of the community and causes intergenerational conflict. Filipek Collignon states that the custom of early arranged marriage persists among the Hmong in the US, and reports that one young girl became suicidal because of the conflict she felt between wanting to continue her own education and her grandmother's insistence that it would be a waste of time and money to pursue a college degree if the girl will just get married and have babies anyway. Filipek Collignon's anecdote is one of many instances which underscore the importance of knowledge of community norms and expectations for those who would plan and implement literacy instruction for refugee and immigrant women.

Many parents -- refugees, immigrants, people of color -- maintain a strong interest in their childrens' education. At a recent DARE (Direct

Action for Rights and Equality) planning meeting (to prepare) for a conference on parental involvement in the schools, I noted varying degrees of observable literate behavior. Parents, mostly mothers from South Providence (an urban 'ghetto') challenged mainstream assumptions of their ignorance or lack of concern about their childrens' learning. Their involvement may not replicate that of mainstream middle class schools: 'he meeting ran off track several times, and the meeting's facilitator read haltingly from an agenda, calling for discussion of items that had already been discussed. Some of the people had some trouble following the words on the agenda, yet all of them were there for the sole purpose of organizing around the issue of their own involvement with their childrens' schooling. Where middle class parent teacher meetings may include playground improvement on their agendas, these particular parents expressed the need to take away guns from children in schools, to insure that they receive information from the schools, and to address high drop out rates among their young. In the next room, teens and younger children were in the process of planning their own youth conference, scheduled to occur simultaneously with the parent conference.

Grassroots efforts, such as those of DARE, and those reported by Ramdas and others, go largely unrecognized by the popular press, and even by academic writers in the mainstream. The DARE conference was attended largely by women who voiced concerns over chronic problems such as their inability to work full-time, take care of their children and attend parent conferences at the schools. One young mother spoke of her own return to adult education and with it her hopes for providing positive modeling for her own children and their education. Conference participants were not always articulate in the ways of conference participants at the MLA and I imagine that my write up of the sessions I attended will collect dust on the shelves at the DARE office. The point is, though, that people are coming together around issues of importance to them. Although they lack

the academic discourse and access to power brokers that such discourse facilitates, they continue to meet and organize and involve people within the community in their struggle to provide equity for parents who lack easy access to understanding about and interaction with their childrens' schools.

In Vancouver, Indo-Canadian women are invited to participate in classes geared specifically to their socio-cultural situations and needs as young mothers and wives with workplace, childcare, and home-related demands placed upon them. In Britain, community workers visit parents of preschool age children with welcome packs in order to begin the school home connection at a very early age. Many of the new parents there (and elsewhere) are themselves very young people, for whom school is not necessarily a thing of the past.

The National Center for Family Literacy, established last July through a grant from the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust, aims to "expand the efforts of the nation to break the cycle of low literacy that exists in many families... [and] focuses on the intergenerational transmission of literate behavior and seeks to maximize the strengths of the family as an institution in assisting its members to participate fully in a literate society". While the notion of 'breaking the cycle' and the assumptions implicit in that notion are problematic, one stands to learn a great deal about the way the funding winds blow through attentive listening to exactly that kind of bureaucratic language. One Kenan program, PACT, (Parent and Child Together) brings parents to the school where their preschool children study. There parents study (ABE, GED, [high school equivalency] and vocations), meet about parenting issues, do volunteer work in the school setting and participate in literacy related activities with their children at the school. Additionally, program personnel provide training to other educators who wish to replicate the program at their own sites or schools.

Although the Kenan program is not a second language program, one is

well advised to look at it. Quality ESL family literacy programs have already run their grant cycles, and it is not clear how or if the direct service components of those programs will be continued. What might this indicate about the value of such learners and programs to funders? How does the Kenan project perpetuate the school-as-authority model of education and the view that America will only survive economically by preparing literate workers for tomorrow?

At the Genesis Preparatory School in Providence, a full array of ancillary services, including transportation, childcare and the provision of a midday meal supplement ESL classes for adults. An intergenerational learning program capitalizes on parents' proximity to their children at the same setting during the school day. Initially viewed as a school for women -- particularly Cambodian widows, the school has since broadened its student base to include men and non-Asian women, mostly Hispanic. The Genesis model invites speculation about perceived roles of men and women. Many, though not all of the men attending classes there are unemployed; similarly most of the women at the school are not employed. Public funding for such an endeavor has been difficult to secure. The marginalization of unemployed or unemployable adults is such that securing support for such programs through public sources has not been successful to any measurable degree. This marginalization of the elderly women, particularly, is not an isolated occurrence. Self-esteem and isolation are not concerns of the state; productive workers are.

in Philadelphia, Project LEIF (Learning English through Intergenerational Friendship) explicitly dealt with the social isolation experienced by older refugees. Weinstein-Shr and Lewis monitored LEIF's evolution to understand the implications of its first years' activities. The program was initiated by a gerontologist with an interest in intergenerational relations, who hired Weinstein-Shr to create a language-learning context through which to mitigate against the social isolation of elderly refugees,

by matching them with college age tutors.

The program's initial goals have been met. Older people are out of their homes, working with younger tutors. However, as Weinstein-Shr examined tutors' learning logs and as tutors' and learners' voices began to be heard, several issues emerged. These issues surfaced as a result of reflection upon intergenerational theory and practice. In many ways the issues serve as hinge pins around several important concerns pertaining to literacy in its broadest contexts, and center around intergenerational conflict, consequences of literacy, significance of language in negotiating relationships in a new setting, and the notion of audience in considering the generation of learners' writing, particularly oral histories which have served as problem-posing generative codes.

Again, one is compelled to consider an increase into ethnographic approaches and explorations of community uses and valuing of literacy. What are the connections between home and school literacies? What literate behaviors occur around and within learners' lives? Where do considerations of native language literacy and culture fit into programming for non-native speakers? To what extent are they participants in literacy activity? Two adult ESL students sit in a parking lot outside school, reading a Colombian newspaper. Another learner carries a birth announcement in her notebook. Two women have forms for me to sign to verify their attendance for welfare reimbursement. Another learner, homebound with two small children, asks me, when I visit her, about an envelope imprinted with charges for use of telephone and TV during her stay in the maternity ward. All of this print activity impacts in various ways upon people's lives, and the quality of people's lives affects their learning. In considering the family as part and parcel of learners' lives, what changes can be made in our thinking of who learners are? Can mainstream providers change the ways in which they view learners and programs? Can they explicitly understand the complexities and richness of learners' lives and communities?

It is commendable that consideration of intergenerational and family literacies explicates the possibilities that a multiplicity of literacies exist, and that literacy is framed in a context beyond that of the book and the school. Many literacy practitioners have worked away from the notion of developing discrete skills in and of themselves and toward realizing ways in which to strengthen learners' abilities within a contextualized social construct. Reading and writing meaningful material provides the context through which various skills may be strengthened and developed; that development continues and exists beyond the classroom walls.

Weinstein-Shr eloquently states that while good teaching practice holds that it is important to teach "language of immediate relevance for use, in fact very little is known about what kinds of language skills are really needed by (elders) or how language is used in immigrant/refugee households". (Weinstein-Shr, forthcoming). Auerbach indicates that existing (program) models "seemed not to be informed by ethnographic research or substantiated"...by what her teachers learned from the learners themselves. One cannot merely report on programs without pointing explicitly to the importance of and need for the careful ethnographic and collaborative work required to design programs to meet learners' needs. Not only do we need to consider the community but also we need to examine the possible consequences of literacy acquisition for these learners. We can learn to recognize literate environments that already exist by visiting learners in their homes, seeing the print surrounding them, and also through recognizing the less obvious signs of literate activity in their lives. Ethnography provides one valuable tool for gaining such an understanding and recognition. Small scale action research, and explicit coinvestigation with learners might also reveal ways in which home and school literacies are or may not be [culturally] congruent. Families do use and are involved in literacy and literate behaviors. How can one negotiate the agenda of school-literacy transmission with that of

facilitating transfer and addition of those literacies already in existence within learners' homes and communities?

What about the stresses that might occur as women gain literacy and may need to renegotiate their own roles within families -- as mothers and/or as wives? Conflict already exists among families as role expectations have been severely changed and violated as young people function as transmitters of knowledge to their once more-knowledgeable elders. Harman and Edelsky speak powerfully to the issues of alienation and connection that accompany acquisition of literacy. Rivera addresses the impact of literacy learning on the lives of Hispanic women at La Guardia Community College in New York. (*A Question of Survival*, in Eddy and Garb, 1987, pp. 8-9).

Politicians and educators tend to stress the importance of early intervention programs. Sticht and McDonald point to the literacy rates of mothers as directly affecting those of their children, and these assertions are cited repeatedly in statements and rationales given in generic family literacy overviews and in programs' descriptive information. While statistics in fact bear out their assertions, literacy practitioners, particularly those who work with immigrants and refugees, cannot overlook the qualitative evidence couched within quantitative reports. Do parents who read have children who read? In the case of an elderly Cambodian widow, with little or no prior experience with literacy, can we ask if children who read might help parents and elders to learn to know what reading is and what the impact of literacy acquisition may be?

The broadening of boundaries around who learners are is appropriate in conjunction with expanding notions of literacy. The extent to which one actively recruits and includes learners, and designs programs around their needs across generations depends on a range of contingencies: mission, funding, population, pedagogical bent and approach, to cite a few. What does this mean? Are missions revised to incorporate funders' directions?

Who sets the direction[s] in which the dollars flow? How prepared are literacy providers to meet the mandates of new funding trends and to what degree do they agree with the slant of those trends?

It seems that the concern for intergenerational learning necessitates a need for collaboration across formerly separate domains. For this reason an attempt to perceive learners in their social context is made here in order to investigate specific ways in which literacy affects peoples' lives as individuals, family and community members.

Case studies of women who work outside the home, who work within the home, or who are supported by public assistance would contribute to a deeper understanding of who the women behind the statistics are. I learn through my own interaction with women learning English and literacy in English. A logical next step to this writing would be to examine specific women and their interactions around literacy, their families and communities. The broad lesson learned from the many women with whom I've worked is that literacy affects each one differently. A Puerto Rican woman tells me she never thought she'd be writing to someone at a housing office in English. A woman, from Hong Kong wants to be able to read a little more than her young children so that she can help them with their homework. She also wants to return to work (stitching in a garment mill) but is unable to find affordable childcare. An older Chinese woman asks me to pronounce and write every new word she hears. This woman works in a factory and leaves school early two of the four nights we meet every week so she can go home and take care of her grandchildren while her daughter attends her own ABE classes. A Cambodian woman (doing assembly work at Stanley-Bostitch) tells Filipek Collignon about the rape and murder of her sister in law and wants to learn to say and write the words in English - rape, sexual assault.

These women's needs and interests are varied and don't seem to correspond to official curricula in any recognizable way. How does housework relate to basic skills in the work place? How does letter

writing prepare a service worker? Some of my learners will (and already do) want to enter (or reenter) the work force. Some will want to pursue job skills training. If they're lucky, the work we've done together may be of use to them when they enroll in skills based training. Clearly my contention is that skills based training/transmission model education does little to work with the learner as a whole person. I would hope that the women with whom I've worked might be able to adapt to new learning situations; it's my responsibility to help them develop the strategies to do so. It's also my responsibility to work toward advocating educational change as well.

In the meantime, I work with my learners to try to facilitate a match between what they've learned and what they want to know; and to help them develop the strategies they'll need to develop their own literacies and to support the literacy development of their children and families.

Acknowledgment of a socially constructed context, and explicit learning about learners' environments -- including their families and communities -- is needed for positive change to occur in the realm of public education in America. Given this assertion, how can scholars and practitioners across disciplines work collaboratively to inform each other and to strengthen each others' contributions to the work needed to be done around literacy? Can cross-discipline findings address policy on national and local levels, and pedagogical practice as well? By viewing literacy as socially situated, it seems that anthropological learning can contribute much to a broader and complementary framework through which to examine ways in which schools, homes, communities and workplaces mutually negate or reinforce each other. An understanding of women's roles globally may help practitioners situate and improve their work locally.

When literacy can enable every woman and girl to walk fearlessly and confidently, alone and with head held high, only then will women opt for literacy voluntarily. Reading and writing skills would then truly become a weapon with which each woman can be empowered to read and write her world, analyze and understand it and, where necessary, transform it. That alone is true justice.

[Ramdas, p. 40]

Ramdas' assertion certainly reflects my own bias toward literacy learning and my participation as a facilitator of such learning. The learners with whom I've worked have had far ranging goals and relationships to learning and literacy. One middle aged Cambodian woman wanted to learn numbers so that she would know which bus to take to go downtown alone. A Dominican woman is currently undergoing counselling and court supervision because she is suspected of abusing her children. Her case worker wants to support her learning, yet cannot help her find childcare after "working hours" so that this learner could attend additional evening classes. A woman married to another student in the same class calls one day and says she'll be out for a week; her husband has another girlfriend and she can't come to school. Three women need me to sign attendance forms for their social workers so that they'll be deemed cooperative clients and maintain their eligibility for welfare assistance. A Puerto Rican student comes along to the DARE conference with me and asks why more Hispanic parents don't show up. The stories go on and on. Each learner is different and yet many of us are bound to each other through the community we build as learners at the Institute, at the housing project where some of them study and within their own ethnic communities as well.

The women with whom I've interacted over ten years of literacy and language teaching have consistently shared their concerns about their own learning and about that of their children. Many of them are working at entry level jobs, and concurrently cook, clean, tend house and family and attend classes for two or three hours daily. Their compliance or lack of compliance with government work-to-earn mandates has more to do with the ways in which these mandates are implemented than in their willingness to work. As Ramdas and James have stated, it is untrue to believe that literacy, per se, in and of itself will enable anyone to significantly change her/his life. Government's current funding of family literacy

programs has much to do with its agenda of lowering welfare dependency and maintaining economic stratification. Women fit into the agenda and cooperate with or resist it in varying ways. Some attend training programs, become pregnant midway through them and drop out. Others want the jobs they'll begin once they've finished training programs, but often find that the jobs for which they've been trained are not available. 1990 is the International Year of Literacy. The Bush administration touts family values, and so it makes sense that the Barbara Bush Foundation supports literacy and family and in one go.

Female learners will make it through the maze of government funded programs and may actually learn wanted skills; others will be placed into jobs with dim prospects of advancement or further learning opportunities; others will opt out altogether by marrying and/or having children, thereby delaying their own (re)entry into the work force. It is my hope that by increasing awareness of the issues confronting women and their communities, literacy providers may be able to work together with their own learners as well as with scholars, politicians, media people and others in order to set forth a more equitable agenda for literacy learning and public education.

Family / Intergenerational Literacy Resources

ALBSU (1989). Parents and Children Enjoy Reading, insert, Newsletter Number 31.

Asad, Talal (1986). The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology in Clifford, J. and G. Marcus (Eds.) Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Auerbach, E. R. (1989). Towards a Social-Contextual Approach to Family Literacy, Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 59, No. 2 (pp. 165 - 181).

Baynham, M. (1988). Literate, biliterate, multiliterate? Some issues for literacy research in J. McCaffery and B. Street (Eds.) Literacy Research in the U.K.: Adult and School Perspectives. Lancaster, UK: RaPAL.

Business Council for Effective Literacy (1989). Literacy Begins at Home. Newsletter No. 19 (April).

Cumming, A. (1989). Learning ESL Literacy among Indo-Canadian Women: Progress Report. Vancouver, B.C.

Eddy, D. and G. Garb (Eds.). (1987). Reports: Literacy and the Learner. Boston: World Education

_____. (1989). Reports: Towards a Fully Literate World. Boston: World Education

Erickson, F. (1984). School Literacy, Reasoning, and Civility: An Anthropologist's Perspective. Review of Educational Research. Vol. 54, No. 4.

Fitzgerald and D. and R. Kaur (Eds.) (no date). Speaking for Ourselves: Sikh Oral History. Manchester: Manchester Free Press, Bombay House.

Harman, S. and C. Edelsky. (1989). The Risks of Whole Language Literacy: Alienation and Connection. Language Arts, Vol. 66, No. 4, April.

Heath, S.B. (1983). Ways with Words. NY: Cambridge University Press.

_____. (1986) Sociocultural Contexts of Language Development, in Beyond Language: Social and Cultural Factors in Schooling Language Minority Students (pp. 144 - 186). Los Angeles: California State Department of Education and California State University.

Home English Literacy for Parents: An ESL Family Literacy Curriculum. Northwest Educational Cooperative, Des Plaines, Ill. 1989.

James, M.D. (1990). Demystifying literacy: reading, writing, and the struggle for liberation, Convergence, Vol. XXIII, No. 1.

Lee, A. (1980). 'Together we learn to read and write': Sexism and literacy. in Spender, D. and E. Sarah (Eds.). Learning to Lose: Sexism in Education.

The Literacy Beat: A special newsletter of the Education Writers Association: 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 310, Washington, . 20036.

Mau, R.r. (1989). Parental Involvement Workshop Concerns. The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students. Vol. 5, Fall.

McIvor, M.C. (Ed.). (1990). Family Literacy in Action: A Survey of Successful Programs. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Holl, L. and S. Diaz. (1988). Change as the goal of educational research. Anthropology and Education Quarterly 18, 300-311.

Nash, A. (1987). English Family Literacy: An annotated bibliography. Boston: University of Massachusetts/Boston, English Family Literacy Project.

Nash, A., Cason, C., Rhum, M., McGrail, L., Gomez-Sanford, R. (1989). Talking Shop: A curriculum sourcebook for participatory adult ESL. Boston, Ma: English Family Literacy Project, University of Massachusetts.

New Partnerships: Education's Stake in the Family Support Act of 1988. Washington, DC: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship.

Nickse, R. (1989). The Noises of Literacy. Office of Educational Research/OBEMLA.

Pramod, P. and E. Enslin. (1990). From learning literacy to regenerating women's space: A story of women's empowerment in Nepal, *Convergence*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1.

Rmadas, L. (1990). Women and literacy: A quest for justice. *Convergence*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1.

Ranard, D.A. (1989). Family Literacy: Trends & Practices. In *America: Perspectives on Refugee Resettlement*. Number 7, December. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Rich, D. (19). The Forgotten Factor in School Success - The Family. Washington, D.C. The Home and School Institute.

Scollon, R. and S. Scollon. (198) Narrative, Literacy and Face in Interethnic Communication. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Simich-Dudgeon, C. (1987). Involving Limited-English-Proficient Parents as Tutors in their Children's Education. *ERIC/CLL News Bulletin*. Vol. 10, No 2. (3 - 7).

Sticht, T.G. and B.A. McDonald. (1989). Making the Nation Smarter: The Intergenerational Transfer of Cognitive Ability. San Diego, Cal: Applied Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Inc.

Street, B. (19). Literacy in Theory and Practice. Cambridge University Press.

Talan, C. (1989). Families for Literacy: Breaking the Cycle of Illiteracy. Report for UK/US Literacy Initiative. NY: Lehman College.

Taylor, D. (1983). Family Literacy: Young Children Learning to Read. Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

Taylor, D. and C. Dorsey Gaines: (1988). Growing Up Literate. Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

Trinity College. (1986). Issues of Parent Involvement and Literacy. Washington, DC: Trinity College.

United States Department of Education NEWS, October 27, 1989.

Weinstein-Shr, G. (forthcoming). Language, Literacy and the Older Refugee in America: Research Agenda for the 90s.

_____. From problem-solving to celebration: Discovering and creating meanings through literacy. to appear in TESL Talk, Ontario.

Wallerstein, N. (1983). Language and culture in conflict. Reading, Ma: Addison-Wesley.

ERIC Digest No. 92 WOMEN, WORK AND LITERACY, compiled by Sandra Kerka. (1989). ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.